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10/ The Bolshevik regime took away the independence of the Belorussian nation by force. The region was first occupied by the Germans, and in 1919 and 1920 it became the arena of the savage and devastating Soviet-Polish War which came to an end only in November , 1920. The peace treaty which the Soviets and the Poles signed in Riga was tragic for Belorussia. In it a nation of eighteen million(1) was dismembered into three parts:

1. According to other estimates the Belorussian nation at that time numbered not 18 but 20 and even 24 million persons.

about four million /2/ Belorussians were given by the Bolsheviks to Poland who, during her existence as a state tried, rashly but unsuccessfully, by every kind of intolerable method to turn Belorussians into Poles and Catholics. The Communist dictatorship was established over the remaining Belorussian territory. But even that remaining under the Communists was subdivided into two parts. Out of the six uyezds of the former Minskaya Guberniya (1) the Belorussian Soviet

1. The six uyezds of the former Minskaya Guberniya comprised the Minskoy, Borisovskiy, Igumenskiy, Bobrugskiy, Slutskiy, and Mozyrskiy uyezd.

Socialist Republic (B. S. S. R.) was organized. The Vitebskaya, Mogilevskaya, and newly organized Gomel'skaya Guberniya remained included in Russian Socialist Federated Soviet Republic
648 (R. S. F. S. R.). The six uyezds of the B. S. S. R. represented a very convenient base for the postwar struggle with Poland. Starting in the very first days after the conclusion of peace with Poland, the Soviets used every means to try and arouse discontent and alarm among the population, especially the Belorussians, who had been left in the power of Poland. The Soviets also attempted to undermine the Polish economy which was rather weak. To this end armed units of the G. P. U. were organized in the border regions of Belorussia and sent into Western Belorussia. These units plundered and burned estates, murdered and executed policemen and government officials. A certain Mukha, the leader of one of these units, was particularly renowned. These "insurgents" always had a place of

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Only toward the end of 1926, after the most persistent petitioning in the Kremlin, and at that time petitioning had not yet become perilous, the question of uniting the Gomel'Guberniya to the B. S. S. R. was raised. However M. Kalinin himself, the President of the Central Executive Committee of the R. S. F. S. R., came out sharply against unification. The Kremlin was forced to resort to a peculiar sort of plebiscite in order to refute the pretensions of the Belorussians. It organized a special commission with the Latvian, Peters, as president, which was to determine on the spot what language was spoken by the inhabitants of Gomel' Guberniya. It was decided that the population had forgotten its language and finally become Russified. No research was undertaken to determine where the population belonged ethnologically. The commission traveled around the sizable territory of the Gomel' Gubernıya using the following method for its investigations: upon arriving in some inhabited place and meeting the peasantry, the members would enter upon some sort of unofficial conversation. This was taken down in shorthand, and an analysis of the notes refuted the calculations of those who had opposed the inclusion of Gomel' Guberniya in the B. S. S. R. The real reasons for the opposition to having the Guberniya transferred were of an economic nature. Gomel' Guberniya is very rich in various raw materials, especially high quality forests which are so situated that transportation of the wood is very convenient. It is criss-crossed in many directions by railroad lines and convenient water routes. A well equipped match industry is centered there, one which at that time was the most active in the U. S. S. R., and there is a paper industry in Dobrush. Obviously it was not intended that the economy of the B. S. S. R. be strengthened at the expense of that of the R. S. F. S. R. This is confirmed by the fact that such industrial centers as Zlynka, Novozybkov, Klintsy, and Starodub, all within twenty or thirty kilometers of Gomel', were not given to the B. S. S. R., simply because some match factories and other manufacturing are located there. The fact of the unification itself passed unnoticed by the masses. Gomel' Guberniya was included in the B. S. S. R. without the customary fanfare and pomp. /13/ The Belorussian nationalist circles were faced with new problems. It was indispensible to take all measures to include the new territory with its Belorussian population within the general scope of operations as quickly as possible, and, moreover, this transitional process had to be accomplished very carefully and painlessly. It all

depended on the capable efforts of the new Belorussian workers who were sent into what had been Gomel' Guberniya. They were able to cope with the task.

Minority Problems

The equality on the Belorussian territory of the four official languages, Belorussian, Russian, Polish, and Jewish, was recognized by a govermental decree. In practice only Belorussian was at all widely used, and Russian was employed in dealing with institutions of the U. S. S. R. Jewish and Polish were spoken in the national schools, kindergartens, theaters, libraries, and so on. The severity with which equality of the four languages was enforced sometimes became absurd. In the town of Rechitsa in 1928, at a municipal teachers conference, one participant who was the principal of a Jewish school made her observations in a speech in Jewish. Of course an interpreter had to be used. A Belorussian schoolteacher, Mokhnach, who had been renowned in the past for his liberal convictions and activities, but who unfortunately was versed in the unexpected twists and turns of Soviet policy, proposed quite correctly that all speakers use "Russian, as it is the most widely understood." For this proposal, which would appear to have been quite innocent, Mokhnach was accused of Great Russian chauvinism, immediately fired from his job, excluded from the trade union, and also deprived of a pension after his forty-five years of service in the school system. This shows just how unsuccessfully the Soviets could choose a subject upon whom to demonstrate how severely and unrelentingly anyone would be punished who transgressed against the Stalinist policy towards the minorities.

Special court chambers where litigation was conducted in Jewish were opened in the large cities to serve the Jewish population. In small towns and in some larger ones where Jews lived in compact groups, local and village soviets were formed -- providing service for the population in its native language. /14/

The national work concerning the so-called Polish population of Belorussia was a rather special case. In Minsk and in other cities there were several responsible workers /in the nationalist movement/ who were Poles by nationality. They were almost all Communists and native-born Poles, for the most part deriving from the Polish Socialist Party (P. P. S.). Moreover, twenty-five percent of the native

438 A large-scale industry had developed.[1] In place of the semi-handicraft workshops which predominated in the old days, large modern
433 factories arose. The timber industry was modernised and developed for increased production of prefabricated dwellings, paper, cardboard, matches, chemical products, and artificial silk. Industries, such as meat-packing, starch and treacle, distilling, dairy produce, tanning, and flax, were highly developed. The mineral resources of the country served as a basis for the building up of the pottery, glass, cement, and similar industries. The engineering plants in Byelorussia turned out machine tools, agricultural machinery and peat-cutting machinery. The extraction of peat was conducted on an extensive scale.

483 After the Revolution, agriculture in Byelorussia also underwent
241 a fundamental change. The individual peasants united in collective farms (kolkhozes) in which they jointly cultivated the soil and had
474 their co-operative dairy farms, piggeries, poultry runs, and beehives. They received substantial assistance from the state in the form of financial credits, tractors, harvester combines, and other agricultural machinery, seeds, equipment for draining marsh-lands, and innumerable other kinds of assistance. Under the Soviet system the cultivated areas of Byelorussia increased considerably, and in 1937 exceeded that of 1913 by 35 per cent.

Area and Population

Area

131 The present area of the Byelorussian Republic is about 228,300 square kilometres. Nearly half of this territory was added in September 1939 when, after the collapse of the Polish State, Western Byelorussia, which had been seized by Poland in 1920, was rejoined to the B.S.S.R. as part of the Soviet Union. The area of this region was 108,000 square kilometres, and the population, 4.8 millions. Of this added territory, 35.5 per cent. was classified as arable, 23.5 per cent. as forests, 24 per cent. as pastures and meadows, and 1.5 per cent. as gardens and orchards.

In August 1940 the area of Byelorussia decreased somewhat when parts of the Vileika and the Baranovichi provinces were transferred from the B.S.S.R. to the Lithuanian Soviet Republic. Another small
[728] decrease occurred after the war in Europe had ended; in August 1945 a treaty was signed between Poland and the U.S.S.R., adjusting the Soviet-Polish frontier roughly along the "Curzon Line", with some deviations in Poland's favour. In consequence of this, Poland received a small strip of the territory which had been previously incorporated in the B.S.S.R., including the largest town of Western Byelorussia, Bialystok.

Population

162 At the census of January 1939 the population of the B.S.S.R. was 5,567,976 (an increase of 11.7 per cent. over December 1926, when the

[1] [Between 1919 and 1941.-- Analyst]

21: Kolarz J-4 (no date) 1952 R1 Soviet Union R1
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III. BYELORUSSIA

The development of Soviet Byelorussia is essentially a copy of the history of the Soviet Ukraine. In many respects it is a very poor copy. Byelorussia is considerably smaller than the Ukraine, it has no outstanding economic wealth such as the Ukraine has and the national consciousness of the Byelorussian people has crystallized far less than that of the Ukrainians. The Byelorussians, it is true, can boast of an illustrious past and can claim for themselves the Lithuanian State of the Middle Ages, whose most important documents were couched in the Byelorussian language. However, the Byelorussians did not produce a Hetman Mazeppa, a vigorous rebel whose memory could inspire the present generation. The modesty of the Byelorussian national movement is almost touching. Nothing could characterize its spirit better than the title of the first Byelorussian publishing company founded in 1906 – 'In our windows also shall the sun shine'.

Byelorussian nationalism in Czarist times was so weak that no Byelorussian succeeded in getting elected to the Duma. The landowners voted for Polish candidates, and the peasants, in their ignorance, for extreme Russian nationalists. The October Revolution found the Byelorussians still too inarticulate as a nation to be able to cope with the great tests of the revolutionary years. Without much external pressure Byelorussia, or rather, what might have become Byelorussia, fell to pieces. The few Byelorussian intellectuals had no clearly defined political aim and turned from one extreme to another, wavering between a Polish, Lithuanian and Russian orientation and thus aggravating the chaos in which the Byelorussian people found themselves. By the end of 1920 the Byelorussians were under five different Byelorussian governments and National Committees, and in addition, had a Minister for Byelorussian Affairs in the Lithuanian Government.

At last the Peace of Riga concluded between Poland and Soviet Russia in 1921 determined the division of Byelorussia: Western Byelorussia with about 2,000,000 Byelorussians went to Poland, while Central and Eastern Byelorussia became part of the Soviet Union.*

SOVIET POLICY IN EASTERN BYELORUSSIA

At first the Soviet régime found it rather difficult to decide which territories to allocate to the Byelorussian S.S.R. When the B.S.S.R. was formally constituted on January 16th, 1921, the Russian communists

* The estimate of 2,000,000 is halfway between Polish and Russian statistics. According to the official Polish census there were but 1,123,000 Byelorussians in 'Western Byelorussia'. Molotov mentioned the figure of 3,000,000 when proclaiming the incorporation of Western Byelorussia into the U.S.S.R. on October 31st, 1939.

Be. 18 538 Kupala avowed his incapacity to become a real Bolshevik poet, thinking in terms of the whole Soviet Union and of all mankind:

'My Fatherland – it is the whole world,
I have torn myself away from my native soil!
Yet still I am not free from it – in sleep
I dream of Byelorussia!'

The role which Kolas and Kupala played in Soviet Byelorussia is unparalleled throughout the U.S.S.R. No Byelorussian Bolshevik ever assumed the role of a national leader of the Byelorussians – the leadership was in the hands of Kolas and Kupala. Instead of 'removing' the two poets, the Soviet régime tried to direct their poetic creation into the 'right channels' and to use them for communist propaganda. Kolas and Kupala were often criticized, at times they seem to have been in disgrace but they never disappeared, as did many excellent writers and poets of almost all the major peoples of the Soviet Union.

S.U. [661] The purge of Kolas and Kupala[1] would have been tantamount to the bankruptcy of the Soviet cultural policy in the B.S.S.R., since the two were not only outstanding literary figures but actually cultural 'awakeners' of their people. Byelorussia could do without its 'national democrat' historians and folklorists, it could do without its leading communist politicians. Kolas and Kupala, however, were indispensable. Their case showed that there are limits even to purges in the Soviet Union. The purge in Byelorussia could not be carried so far as to endanger the cultural foundations of the third largest people of the Soviet Union. This is why Kolas and Kupala were spared despite all their 'sins' and 'deviations'.

The Soviet régime needed Kolas and Kupala not only as pillars of Byelorussian culture in the U.S.S.R. but also as the political heralds of Byelorussian irredentism which might evoke a response among the oppressed Byelorussian population of Poland. The two poets did indeed fulfil this task not as Bolsheviks but as nationalists and denounced most violently the partition of Byelorussia. Most typical in this respect was a poem by Kolas in which he cried out: 'Our homeland has been broken up by foreign robbers . . . Away with their frontiers! Down with their barriers! To us belong the fields and woods! Let us rise together with one mind and one will, happiness and freedom will not come to us of themselves! Long enough have we been hunted and driven from our homeland!'

'GREATER BYELORUSSIA'

Be. 131 728 In September 1939 came the triumph for people like Kolas and Kupala,[2] who by the force of circumstances had abandoned national democracy and embraced some sort of Byelorussian national communism–Byelo-

1 [Cf. cat. 116, pp. 157-158 -- Analyst]
2 [Cf. Category 538, pp. 157-158 -- Analyst]

Belorussia RC1

russia became reunited at the price of Western Byelorussia accepting the Soviet totalitarian régime. The B.S.S.R. increased its territory from 48,000 to 80,000 square miles and almost doubled the number of its inhabitants. The merger of Western and Eastern Byelorussia created a State of over 10,000,000 inhabitants uniting almost the entire Byelorussian people. The annexation of Western Byelorussia enabled the Soviet Union to push nearer to Central Europe, but from a merely economic point of view the territory was a liability. Western Byelorussia was easily the most backward part of the Polish State as it existed in the inter-war period. The territory is devoid of any large industry, its agricultural soil is poor and there are but few rail and road communications. Marshes cover a considerable part of Western Byelorussia. In the annexed former Polish province of Polesia which is 14,000 square miles in area, the famous Marshes of Pinsk or Pripet Marshes form 56 per cent of the total territory.[84]

There are but few small towns in Western Byelorussia; only two localities have about 50,000 inhabitants each, Grodno and Brest Litovsk. Originally 'Western Byelorussia' as it had emerged from the Molotov-Ribbentrop deal for the partition of Poland, had one town of 100,000 inhabitants, Bialystok, a centre of the Polish textile industry and the only place in the whole of 'Western Byelorussia' possessing a fairly large industrial class. For this reason, Bialystok was chosen as a kind of emergency capital of Western Byelorussia during the weeks between its occupation by the Red Army and its full incorporation into the B.S.S.R. The 'Peoples Assembly' of Western Byelorussia which on October 28th, 1939, formulated its 'request for admission into the U.S.S.R.' also met in Bialystok.

The new 'centre of Western Byelorussia' had the drawback that it had no Byelorussian population; it had only Polish and Jewish inhabitants and the outskirts of the town were Polish. In view of the national composition of Bialystok and its surroundings the Soviet Government was unable to maintain its claim to the Bialystok area after the end of the war, particularly since it was located to the east of the Curzon line which Russia adopted in principle as the Polish-Russian frontier. The area of Bialystok covering roughly 5,800 square miles was thus re-allocated to Poland. This transfer was advantageous for the Soviet Union since the B.S.S.R. rid itself thereby of a Polish population of 1,000,000 and thus considerably reduced the seriousness of the minority problem within its boundaries.

After the annexation of Western Byelorussia the minority issue threatened to cause considerable worry to the Minsk Government, since half of the annexed population were either Poles or Jews. In the post-war B.S.S.R. this problem no longer arose not only because of the substantial frontier rectification in Poland's favour in the Bialystok area,